

Washington, DC — Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) announced that the Coast Guard & Maritime Transportation Act (H.R. 2443), passed by the House earlier this week, removes clearance restrictions that have hampered I-5 bridge reconstruction over the Columbia Slough.

Twenty years ago, specific bridge clearance language was included in the Coast Guard appropriations legislation to ensure that bridges crossing the Columbia Slough did not impede commercial traffic on that waterway. Commercial traffic no longer uses the Slough, yet the clearance restrictions have remained, preventing the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) from proceeding with the important Delta Park reconstruction project along Interstate 5.

“I am very pleased that we were able to make this simple, common sense change to the Coast Guard bill,” said Blumenauer. “ODOT’s calling our attention to this need and the Coast Guard’s willingness to remove these obsolete restrictions are good examples of federal and state agencies working in partnership to create more livable communities.”

“This is great news,” said Bruce Warner, Director for the Oregon Department of Transportation. “Removing this outdated restriction means we can design a project that will cost less and minimize visual impacts. This is a win for both taxpayers and livable communities.”

ODOT’s Delta Park project will improve safety and traffic flow on a one-mile section of southbound Interstate 5 north of Portland, Oregon where the freeway crosses the Columbia Slough. This section of I-5 is notorious for daily traffic jams as the road narrows from three lanes to two. The project will widen the freeway, the medians, and the shoulders of two Interstate bridges.

Blumenauer requested the removal of the bridge clearance restrictions at ODOT’s request. The Coast Guard, which has jurisdiction over navigable waterways, supported lifting the obsolete restrictions to allow the project to move forward.